871 Civilians Killed, including 179 Children, in Eastern Ghouta in a Month after Security Council Resolution 2401 on Cessation of Hostilities was Adopted

Tens of Thousands Displaced and Chemical and Incendiary Weapons Used, Crimes against Humanity and War Crimes Continue

SNHR
SYRIAN NETWORK FOR HUMAN RIGHTS
الشبكة السورية لحقوق الإنسان

Sunday, March 25, 2018
The Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR), founded in June 2011, is a non-governmental, independent group that is considered a primary source for the OHCHR on all death toll-related analyses in Syria.

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I. Introduction and Report Methodology
What purpose did Security Council Resolution 2401 serve? Why was it adopted by the Security Council in the first place? Considering how the crimes perpetrated by the Syrian-Russian-Iranian alliance have increased, both in types and numbers, in an unprecedented manner post-Resolution 2401 which was adopted on the 24th of last February. The Resolution failed to stop any type of violations, many of which constitute crimes against humanity and war crimes, and even chemical weapons were used. Tens of thousands of people have been forcibly displaced from the towns and cities of Eastern Ghouta. They have been degraded and humiliated in front of the eyes of the media, which only was to deliver a very specific message, as we’ve seen videos of pro-regime intelligence members who were giving water and food for the people whom the Syrian regime and its allies have displaced from Eastern Ghouta in return of submitting and agreeing to say pro-Assad chants. These videos weren’t leaked, but rather deliberate and directed to anyone who is still talking about a political resolution.

This report focuses on the unlimited violations that have been perpetrated openly by the Syrian-Russian-Iranian alliance in Eastern Ghouta, Damascus suburbs in light of a complete absence of any legal, international, or moral deterrent. These violations were also followed by forcibly displacing tens of thousands of residents after entire towns and areas had been wiped off almost completely. In addition, we recently started noticing attacks against Idlib governorate by the same alliance, as a large massacre took place in Harem town in which 44 civilians were killed, including 17 children, after a month of relative stability. We will be talking about the violations in Idlib governorate in an upcoming report.
**Fadel Abdul Ghany, chairman of SNHR, says:**

“The Security Council has failed to provide any form of humanitarian protection for civilians from the killing, enforced displacement, torture, and enforced-disappearance. Also, the Security Council has failed to stop the flow of millions of refugees, as well as upholding any of its Resolutions. Russia, a member of the Security Council, has voted 11 times to protect the rule of the Assad family, while China voted seven times in favor of the Assad family. On the other hand, the rest of the members haven’t made any notable efforts to put an end to the Syrian catastrophe. The Security Council’s mission is now to threaten security and peace in Syria.”

**Methodology**

The report outlines the most notable violations by the parties to the conflict from when Security Council Resolution 2401 was adopted on the evening of February 24, 2018, until the evening of March 24, 2018. We have analyzed the pictures and videos we received and verified their authenticity using special software we have. We have also spoke to survivors from the attacks, victims’ relatives, or eyewitnesses to some of the incidents. This report contains one account that we’ve collected by speaking directly to the eyewitnesses, where it is not cited from any open sources.

In the course of the ongoing monitoring for incidents and developments by SNHR team through a wide network including tens of various sources that have been built over an accumulation of extensive relations since the start of our work. When we receive information, or hear some news about a violation via the internet or media outlets, we work on following-up on this news and try to verify and collect evidences and data. In some cases, the researcher is able to visit the incident location at the soonest. However, this is a rarity in light of the incredibly high security risks, and given the frequency of daily incidents and in light of the human and material resources at hand. Therefore, the possibility to access evidences vary from one case to another, and, hence, the degree of its classification. Usually, what we do, at SNHR, in such cases is relying on accounts from survivors who experience the violation firsthand, where we try to access those directly, and, to a second degree, who saw or filmed the violation, in addition to analyzing available materials from open sources such as the internet and media outlets. Thirdly, we try to speak to medical personnel who treated the wounded, assessed the symptoms, and determined the cause of death.

Please see the methodology adopted at SNHR for [documenting victims](mailto:info@sn4hr.org) and [classifying vital civilian facilities](mailto:info@sn4hr.org).
the investigations included in this report have proved that the targeted areas were civilian areas where no military centers or armories for armed opposition factions or extremist Islamic groups were found before or during the attack. Also, the aggressing forces didn’t alert the civilians prior to the attacks as the international humanitarian law requires. SNHR has analyzed the videos and pictures that were posted online, or were sent to us by local activists via e-mail, Skype, or social media. Some of the videos published by activists show the location of the attacks, the dead bodies, the injured, and the huge destruction in the aftermath of the bombardment.

This report only represents the bare minimum, which we were able to document, of the magnitude and severity of the violation that occurred. It also doesn’t cover the social, economic, mental, and demographic ramifications.

II. Eastern Ghouta is Majorly Worse than the Catastrophe of Aleppo’s Eastern Neighborhoods

It was only when Russian and Syrian forces tightened their grip on residents and fighters in Aleppo’s eastern neighborhood that the Security Council responded by Resolution 2328, which was intensely criticized for containing a phrase: “Stresses that these evacuations must be conducted in accordance with international humanitarian law”. The Security Council is responsible to stop violations and war crimes, and therefore the Security Council has to stop enforced displacement, as there was no such thing as enforced displacement in accordance with the international law in Aleppo’s neighborhoods considering that the displaced have been uprooted from their homes in light of the siege, bombardment, and killing. Nonetheless, the same Resolution included: “stresses the importance to ensure the voluntary, safe and dignified passage of all civilians from the eastern districts of Aleppo or other areas, under the monitoring of and coordination by the United Nations and other relevant institutions, to a destination of their choice;” The Resolution charges the United Nations to ensure that. However, in the case of Eastern Ghouta, the Security Council stood idly by even though it is immeasurably more dangerous seeing that a large portion of the displaced have fallen to the grip of the Syrian regime and its Security apparatus.

On March 3, Syrian-Iranian alliance forces on the ground managed to raid al Shefouniya town after air attacks that involved hundreds of missiles and artillery shells. Misraba town followed on March 10, and then Madyara on the day after, before Hamouriya had fallen on March 15 as the bombardment have erased entire buildings and residences from existence in these towns. Kafr Batna town was seized on March 17, and then Saqba on the next day, followed by Hazza town on March 23. Subsequently, the Syrian regime and its allies
have managed to seize 80% of the besieged Eastern Ghouta in one month after Security Council adopted Resolution 2401. It seems that the Security Council Resolution gave the Syrian-Russian-Iranian alliance the legitimacy to do so.

In light of the Syrian-Iranian alliance’s progression on the ground, the remaining residents fled these towns to whatever areas were left under the control of Syrian opposition in Eastern Ghouta, which resulted in an immensely dense population in the increasingly shrunk areas in light of the ongoing, heavy aerial bombardment. On March 11, Eastern Ghouta was split into three sections. Some of the civilians who had lost their homes started heading for al Wafidin Camp, which the Syrian regime opened on February 27. The Syrian regime’s official media, as well as pro-regime outlets, air a video that was allegedly recorded on March 15. The video showed waves of civilians leaving via Hamouriya passage after Syrian regime forces took over Hamouriya town.

SNHR team received some reports that alleged that the Syrian regime have separated males over the age of 16 from the displaced residents in al Wafidin Camp near Douma city. This was most likely to deploy them to battlefronts, while children, women, and elderlies were sent to temporary shelters in Adra city and the nearby Dwair area in northeastern Damascus sub-
urbs governorate, as well as shelters in Herjalla village which is located in southern Damascus suburbs governorate, where Security forces are interrogating them and examining their situation. Red Crescent teams were allowed to enter and provide the necessary aids, while detainees’ relatives were allowed to visit them for specified periods of time.

**Most notable agreements and resolutions on Eastern Ghouta in the month following Security Council Resolution 2401**

On Monday, March 5, 2018, the UN's Representative to Syria, Sajjad Malik, was with the UN aid convoy that entered Douma city in Eastern Ghouta. In the aftermath of the visit, Malik expressed his shock over the destruction, fear, and poor humanitarian conditions he’s witnessed. He added that he was upset because the bombardment didn’t stop during the unloading of the trucks despite the UN Resolution, which forced them to pull out before finishing their mission.

On March 9, 2018, head of Jaish al Islam political office posted a statement on his Twitter account that revealed that they’ve reached an agreement with the UN to evacuate a number of Hay’at Tahrir al Sham fighters to Idlib after they had been detained since April 2017. One group have been evacuated so far.

UN High Commissioner for Refugees Flippo Grandi said in a press release that he was appalled by what is happening to the civilians in Syria in general and Eastern Ghouta in particular.

Over the course of March 13-14, 51 injured were evacuated from Douma city, Eastern Ghouta, to Damascus city under the oversight of the UN.

The International Red Cross Committee published a statement, on March 14, saying that parties to the conflict have yet to contact the Committee regarding the evacuations from Eastern Ghouta, as the Committee didn’t take part in the operations as they said.

On March 15, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) released a comprehensive report on the humanitarian situation in Eastern Ghouta between February 1 and March 13. The report focused on the worsening living situation in light of the ongoing bombardment by Syrian regime forces on the area.
António Guterres, the UN Secretary-General, expressed his deep concerns on March 16 over the desperation shown by the people fleeing Eastern Ghouta and Ifreen. Guterres renewed his calls to implement Security Council Resolution 2401.

On March 16, Peter Maurer, head of the International Red Cross Committee, stated following his visit to Syria, “I am myself with many humanitarian workers on the ground both exhausted and fed up with the blind justification of gross violations against civilians.”

An OCHA report released on March 17 casted a light on the residents of Eastern Ghouta. The report focuses on the conditions of those who were forcibly displaced and were transferred by the Syrian regime to shelters.

On March 20, The UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) released a report on the conditions of the people who fled the conflict in Eastern Ghouta. The UNHCR renewed its calls to ensure the protection and safety of both new IDPs and the hundreds of thousands of civilians who are still living under an intense conflict and need aids.

On the same day, the UN spokesperson, Marixie Mercado, spoke, in a press briefing in Geneva, about the role of the organization in taking care of the people who fled Eastern Ghouta and were detained by the Syrian regime in shelters. Mercado called on the parties to the conflict to allow the passage of aids to the people who are still under the siege.

On March 21, local activists reported that Ahrar al Sham Islamic Movement have agreed on a settlement with Russian forces that resulted in evacuation the fighters in Harasta city along with people who want to flee to northern Syria. The Movement didn’t talk about such agreement on their official accounts. We estimate that around 7,000 individuals have fled the city on two waves over the course of March 22-23. Consequently, the city is now under the control of Syrian regime forces.

On March 23, Wael Ilwan, spokesperson for al Rahman Corps, announced via his official Telegram Channel that an agreement has been reached with Russian forces to evacuate the sick from the middle-section in Eastern Ghouta, which includes the city of Irbeen and Zamalka and Ein Tarma towns as well as Jobar neighborhood in Damascus. The agreement also provided that fighters and civilians who wish to flee can do so in exchange of releasing the captives from Syrian regime forces who were detained by al Rahman Corps.
The Syrian Arab Red Crescent announced that they have managed to meet the needs of 54,268 people who fled Eastern Ghouta.

**III. Executive Summary**

**A. massacres and other acts of unlawful killing:** we’ve recorded the killing of 871 civilians, including 179 children, 123 women (adult female), four media workers, seven medical personnel, among them was a doctor, and 12 civil defense members, at the hands of Syrian regime forces and their allies. Also, we have recorded no less than 34 massacres.

**B. Attacks on vital civilian facilities:** we’ve documented no less than 19 attacks on vital civilian facilities by Syrian regime forces and their allies, as follows: eight civil defense vehicles and facilities, four medical facilities, four mosques, two local markets, and one official headquarter.

**C. Prohibited weapons:** we have documented one attack using chemical weapons by Syrian regime forces, three attacks using incendiary ammunitions, and three attacks that involved cluster munitions by Syrian/Russian regime forces. We’ve also documented that Syrian regime forces helicopters dropped on less than 732 barrel bombs in the period of time covered by the report.
IV. Details
A. Massacres and other acts of unlawful killing
1- Syrian regime forces
Kafr Batna town – Monday, March 5, 2018
Fixed-wing Syrian/Russian regime forces warplanes (the incident is still being investigated to accurately identify the perpetrator party) fired a number of missiles at the residential neighborhoods in the town, which resulted in the killing of 23 civilians, including one child. The town was under the control of factions from the armed opposition at the time of the incident, whereas it is currently under the control of Syrian regime forces.

Hamouriya town – Wednesday, March 7, 2018
**Fixed-wing** Syrian/Russian regime forces warplanes (the incident is still being investigated to accurately identify the perpetrator party) fired **a number of missiles** at the residential neighborhoods in the town, which resulted in the killing of 26 civilians, including **four children**. The town was under the control of factions from the armed opposition at the time of the incident, whereas it is currently under the control of Syrian regime forces.

![Victims killed in a massacre by Syrian/Russian regime forces in Hamouriya town, Damascus suburbs – March 7, 2018](image-url)
Saqba city – Thursday, March 8, 2018
Fixed-wing Syrian/Russian regime forces warplanes (the incident is still being investigated to accurately identify the perpetrator party) fired a number of missiles at an ambulance belonging to the civil defense’s center 114 in the city. Three civil defense members were killed - Yasser Subhiya, Mohammad Hashish, and Ismail Hashish - while four others were wounded. The city was under the control of factions from the armed opposition at the time of the incident, whereas it is currently under the control of Syrian regime forces.

Hamouriya town – Wednesday, March 14, 2018
Fixed-wing Syrian/Russian regime forces warplanes (the incident is still being investigated to accurately identify the perpetrator party) fired a missile at the house of Ahmad Bashir Hamdan, a media worker and member of Hamouriya Media Office and Ghouta Media Center. Ahmad was killed by shrapnel who inflicted most of his body. The town was under the control of factions from the armed opposition at the time of the incident, whereas it is currently under the control of Syrian regime forces.
Media worker Mohammad Ayman¹ told us that warplanes bombed his colleague Ahmad’s house around 10:00 on Wednesday, March 14: “The missile landed in the house garden near Ahmad. A shrapnel fatally injured him in the head, in addition to the shrapnel that inflicted most of his bodies. On the afternoon of that day, my friends who were in the area told me the news of Ahmad’s death. They told me that his father was injured too.”

Kafr Batna town – Friday, March 16, 2018
Fixed-wing Syrian/Russian regime forces warplanes (the incident is still being investigated to accurately identify the perpetrator party) fired a number of civilians a gathering of civilians inside a local market in the town, which resulted in the killing of 51 civilians, as we have been able to document at the time of this writing. The town was under the control of factions from the armed opposition at the time of the incident, whereas it is currently under the control of Syrian regime forces.

Irbeen city – Monday, March 19, 2018
Fixed-wing Syrian/Russian regime forces warplanes (the incident is still being investigated to accurately identify the perpetrator party) fired a missile at a shelter that houses civilians, which resulted in the killing of 17 civilians (15 children and two women). It should be noted that the basement is a recently rehabilitated school that was turned into a shelter by the residents in light of the ruthless offensive against Eastern Ghouta. The city was under the control of factions from the armed opposition at the time of the incident.

Douma city – Tuesday, March 20, 2018
Fixed-wing Syrian/Russian regime forces warplanes (the incident is still being investigated to accurately identify the perpetrator party) fired a number of missiles in parallel with a barrel bomb attack by Syrian regime helicopters and a shelling by Syrian regime artillery and rocket launchers who fired shells and rockets at the city. The attack resulted in the killing of 59 civilians, including 15 children and six women. The city was under the control of factions from the armed opposition at the time of the incident.

Douma city – Wednesday, March 21, 2018
Syrian regime forces artillery fired a number of shells near the civil defense team, center 300 in the city, as the team was checking a previously bombed site. Three civil defense members were killed –Wasim al Najjar, Mohammad al Awwa, and Yousef al Hammouri- while a fourth was wounded. The city was under the control of factions from the armed opposition at the time of the incident.

¹ We contacted him via Facebook on March 15, 2018
Irbeen city – night-time, Thursday, March 22, 2018
Fixed-wing Syrian/Russian regime forces warplanes (the incident is still being investigated to accurately identify the perpetrator party) fired a number of missiles at a shelter in the city, which resulted in the killing of 51 civilians, including 20 children and 16 women. The city was under the control of factions from the armed opposition at the time of the incident.
Ein Tarma town – Friday, March 23, 2018
A Syrian regime forces’ sniper stationed in the vicinity of the town opened fire at the town, which resulted on the killing of the paramedic Mahmoud al Khatib, from Hamouriya, as he was tending to the wounded from a previous shelling.

B. Attacks on vital civilian facilities

1- Syrian regime forces

Saqba city – Thursday, March 8, 2017
Fixed-wing Syrian/Russian regime forces warplanes (the incident is still being investigated to accurately identify the perpetrator party) fired a number of missiles at an ambulance belonging to the civil defense’s center 114 in the city, which resulted in the killing of three civil defense members while four others were wounded. Additionally, the ambulance was heavily damaged and rendered out of commission. The city was under the control of factions from the armed opposition at the time of the incident, whereas it is currently under the control of Syrian regime forces.

Irbeen city – Monday, March 12, 2018
Fixed-wing Syrian/Russian regime forces warplanes (the incident is still being investigated to accurately identify the perpetrator party) fired a number of missiles at the Grand Mosque in the city. The mosque building was heavily destroyed and its furniture was heavily damaged. The city was under the control of factions from the armed opposition at the time of the incident.

Harasta city – Monday, March 18, 2018
Syrian regime forces rocket launchers targeted Harasta Hospital, which resulted in casualties. Additionally, the hospital building and its equipment were heavily damaged. The city was under the control of factions from the armed opposition at the time of the incident, whereas it is currently under the control of Syrian regime forces.
Douma city – Monday, March 19, 2018
Syrian regime forces helicopters dropped a barrel bomb on al Mahmoud Mosque in the middle of the city. The mosque building and its furniture were heavily damaged. The city was under the control of factions from the armed opposition at the time of the incident.

C. Prohibited weapons
1- Incendiary ammunitions
Syrian regime forces
Misraba town – Friday, March 2, 2018
Around 22:45, Syrian regime forces rocket launchers fired a number of rockets loaded with incendiary ammunitions that targeted the center of Misraba town. Around 10 houses were burned. The town was under the control of factions from the armed opposition at the time of the incident, whereas it is currently under the control of Syrian regime forces.

Douma city – Monday, March 19, 2018
Around 19:45, Syrian regime forces rocket launchers fired a number of rockets loaded with incendiary ammunitions that targeted the residential area in the center of the city. A number of houses were burned. The city was under the control of armed opposition factions at the time of the incident.
2- Chemical weapons

Syrian regime forces

Hamouriya town, Monday, March 5, 2018

Between 21:00 and 22:00, Syrian regime forces helicopters dropped a barrel bomb loaded with a poison gas on the residential neighborhoods in southeastern Hamouriya town. About 25 civilians were injured, as the victims suffered from breathing difficulties and nausea. Among the victims were two civil defense members.

According to the data on the website worldweatheronline, temperature in Damascus city and its vicinity was 17 Celsius at the closest time to the attack, about an hour prior, while windspeed was 6 mph.

The town was under the control of factions from the armed opposition at the time of the incident, whereas it is currently under the control of Syrian regime forces.
3- Cluster munitions
**Syrian/Russian regime forces**
Irbeen city, Sunday – March 11, 2018
Fixed-wing Syrian/Russian regime forces warplanes (the incident is still being investigated to accurately identify the perpetrator party) fired no less than two RBK-500 missiles loaded with AO-2.5RTM/AO-2.5RT submunitions. The city was under the control of armed opposition factions at the time of the incident.

V. Conclusions and Recommendations
1- Syrian-Iranian alliance forces have, beyond any doubt, violated Security Council resolution 2401, which states that hostilities should be ceased, as well as resolutions 2139 and 2254 that preceded, as both resolutions state that indiscriminate attacks must be ceased. Also, these forces have violated Articles 7 and 8 of Rome Statute through the crime of willful killing which constitutes war crimes.
2- The bombardment has caused collateral damages that involved casualties, injuries, or significant damages to civilian objects. There are strong indicators that suggest that the damage was too excessive in relation to the anticipated military benefit.
3- The international humanitarian law explicitly prohibits enforced displacement with restricted exceptions. Any violation of its rules in this regard constitutes a war crime. Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court states that as well (Articles 8-2-b-viii and 8-2-e-viii).
Enforced displacement is a war crime in non-international armed conflict. When perpetrated as part of a widespread or systematic attack against civilians, enforced transfer constitutes a serious breach to Geneva Agreements. It also qualifies as crimes against humanity (Article 7-1-d of Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court) in addition to the rules 129, 130, 131, 132, and 133 of the customary international law. What the Syrian regime and its allies have perpetrated in the context of a coordinated, deliberate, widespread attack based on informed strategies constitutes, therefore, a crime against humanity. In addition, these acts were committed in a non-international armed conflict which constitutes a war crime.

**Recommendations**

**Security Council**
- The Security Council has to take additional steps after resolution 2401 was adopted, which explicitly provides for the cease of hostilities and facilitating the passage of humanitarian aids into besieged areas.
- The Syrian case should be referred to the International Criminal Court and all those who are responsible for crimes should be held accountable including the Russian regime whose involvement in war crimes has been proven.
- Instill security and peace in Syria and implement the norm of the Responsibility to Protect in order to protect the lives, culture, and history of the Syrian people from being destroyed, looted, and ruined.
- Expand sanctions to include the Syrian, Russian, and Iranian regimes who are directly involved in committing crimes against humanity and war crimes against the Syrian people.
- Compel the Syrian regime to cease settlement and demographic replacement operations in the cities and neighborhoods whose residents are being displaced.
- Ensure the right of the refugees and IDPs to return and recover all of their lands and properties.
- Enforced displacement is a threat to the region and the Syrian lands that will shake security and stability. Instilling peace and security in Syria is a core part to the responsibilities of the Security Council.

**International Community**
- In light of the split of the Security Council and its utter inability, steps should be taken on the national and regional levels to form alliances to support the Syrian people that would protect them from the daily killing and siege and enhance the support for the relief efforts. Additionally, the principle of universal jurisdiction must be activated in local courts regarding these crimes in order to conduct fair trials for all those who were involved.
• SNHR has repeatedly called for the implementation of the “Responsibility to Protect” in tens of studies and reports and as a member of the International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect (ICRtoP) after all political channels through the Arab League’s plan and then Mr. Kofi Annan’s plan have been consumed, as well as the Cessation of Hostilities statements and Astana agreements that followed. Therefore, steps under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations should be taken and the norm of the “Responsibility to Protect”, which was established by the United Nations General Assembly, should be implemented. The Security Council is still hindering the protection of civilians in Syria.
• Renew the pressure on the Security Council to refer the case in Syria to the International Criminal Court
• Work on fulfilling justice and achieving accountability in Syria through the United Nations General Assembly and the Human Rights Council and work on activating the principle of the universal jurisdiction.
• Supply makeshift hospitals with the necessary medical equipment, especially prothesis in light of the rapid increase in amputation cases among the wounded in Syria. 2,400 various artificial limbs should be secured in all of the areas of Eastern Ghouta as soon as possible.

OHCHR
The OHCHR should submit a report to the Human Rights Council and other organs of the United Nations on the incidents mentioned in this report. Also, the OHCHR should expand more on enforced displacement in Syria and its dangers, and condemn the practices of the Syrian regime and all those who responsible.

United Nations special envoy to Syria
• Expand Security Council briefings rather than only limiting them to the violations of al Nussra Front and ISIS
• Condemn the perpetrators of the crimes, the massacres, and those who were primarily responsible for breaching Security Council resolutions.

The Russian regime
• Adhere to the truce it announced and apply pressure on the Syrian regime and its Iranian militias to allow the sick and the humanitarian cases to exit first.
• Ensure the safety of the civilians who want to exit without any arrests or enforced-disappearances.
• Stop shielding the Syrian regime at the Security Council and using veto to prevent the passing of any international resolution that punishes the Syrian regime.
• The Syrian state is one of the state parties to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Therefore, it is bound to refrain from carrying out enforced displacement operations, and it should prevent its occurrence and secure protection of residents from such practices rather than being the one who is carrying out these practices under a clear support from the Iranian regime.

**Acknowledgment and Condolences**
Our most heartfelt gratitude and condolences to all the residents and local activists who contributed effectively to this report.